

# Evolution of Europeanism and Development of European Integration<sup>1</sup>

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Many are inclined to identify the concept of an integrated Europe with the present form of European integration – the European Union. However the idea of united European states is rooted in common European thinking much earlier, and its emergence cannot be attributed exclusively to the political and economic conditions that prevailed in the period after World War II. Various idealistic concepts had been formulated before in the works of artists, philosophers and scientists, including Dante, Comenius, Erasmus of Rotterdam, or Immanuel Kant. As early as 1849, Victor Hugo used the term ‘United States of Europe’ to indicate a goal to be aimed at by each European country. Viewing the early stages of industrialisation, Saint-Simon, on the other hand, also studied the economic and technical conditions of European integration, pointing out the need for establishing a comprehensive European organisation, a kind of European Parliament.

Then, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, several plans were

put forward to realise European unity in an institutionalised form. In this respect, special mention should be made of Richard Coudenhove Calergi, born in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, who published his book entitled ‘Pan-Europa’ in 1923. The book lists concrete proposals for uniting Europe. The ‘Pan-European Movement’, organised on the basis of his work in the 1920s, formulated a concept of economic integration as well.

Yet, a basis for actually creating an institutionalised Europe was provided through the lessons learned from the destruction caused by World War II. It was then that many realised that cooperation created on a loose intergovernmental basis, similar to that of the League of Nations which operated between the two world wars, could not provide a sufficient guarantee for peaceful coexistence and the development of the states of Europe. The League of Nations failed to draw together European states either politically, economically, or culturally, and, as a result of its weakness as an

institution for one thing, even failed to prevent the most horrible war in the history of Europe from happening. This failure showed that Member States do not look upon an organisation operating without supra-national control and based on loose inter-governmental relations as a guarantee of sustainable cooperation. Furthermore, it became evident that if a state finds that its national interests are better served if cooperation is called off and even if a war is launched, it may not hesitate to do so.

Also, the western part of the Europe that was divided after World War II, realised quite early that the old continent would be able to increase its largely diminished political and economic weight and influence in the nascent bipolar arrangement of the world only through integration. Regional economic cooperation appeared indispensable for the development of the countries of Europe with their fragmented national markets, and also for regaining and strengthening their position in the world economy. In addition, economic cooperation was necessary, in the face of the restructuring of the world economy and the competitive advantage of the United States (market scale, technological level, etc.), as well as for the sake of technological and structural modernisation.

Thus, following the devastation brought about by the World War, politicians in Western Europe started to discuss the feasibility, rather than the necessity, of integration. The main issue was whether a political, military or economic orientation, or a combination thereof, was needed to preserve peace in Europe and enable the countries of Europe to recover; also, it had to be determined which countries would take part in the unfolding process of integration.

After 1945, the idea of unity became so popular that various movements aimed at European integration were formed one after the other in nearly every European country, except those controlled by the Soviet Union. The development of the idea of European unity is evidenced by the fact that parties belonging to differing political families started to set up their European organisations with the aim of creating a federal Europe.

A feature shared by the various national and international movements was the intention to create a united Europe on the basis of a common system of institutions. These ideas centred around a federalism that included, directly or indirectly, the establishment of a European system of institutions on a supranational basis.



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Many European governments, however, appeared reluctant to take a defensive step in this direction and took a standpoint that preferred looser cooperation primarily based on inter-governmental cooperation, in line with the tradition of policy making by nation-states. This was the approach taken in the setting up of the Council of Europe, however, did not represent a bloc aiming at integration in terms of competence, operation of activities; rather, it appeared to be a regional international organisation in the traditional sense.

Of the Western European countries, it was the United Kingdom, with its colonial and commonwealth interests still playing an important role, that did not intend to join an organisation aimed at integration in which national sovereignty was restricted through the operation of supranational institutions. On the other hand, other countries – the Benelux states, for example – promoted the idea of an establishment of an organisation based on economic cooperation to realise mutual interests. Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg had already decided to set up the Benelux union in 1944, which was created in 1948. The cooperation between the Benelux states represented real integration, rather than a mere customs union.

By 1949, the problem of what to do with Germany – a question on the table since the end of World War II – had become crucial. The Americans – in an attempt to counterbalance the expansion of the Russian sphere of influence – considered the military strengthening of West Germany as an increasingly urgent task, while France and other Western European allies were reluctant to support this measure for lack of appropriate safety guarantees. It was clear that resolving French–German relations was a critical issue for the future of Europe. Promoters of the idea of a European union were convinced that the resolution of the century-old German–French conflict was a precondition for creating a common Europe.

For the French, fear of a new German recovery raised the issue of how Germany and its strength could be controlled, since the alternative of taking punitive revenge had obviously failed after World War I. Promoters of a unified Europe saw a guarantee for building a peaceful and strong Europe through institutions with a supranational character that could embrace France and Germany alike.

Considerable impetus for the acceleration of Western European integration was stimulated by developments taking place in Central



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and Eastern Europe. Following World War II, the establishment of single-party states and communist regimes in countries occupied by the Soviet Union proceeded a high speed. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe falling under Soviet orientation attempted to split away from the democratic orientation of Western European countries from a political and also economic perspective. Finally, the economic division of Europe was institutionalised through the Marshall Plan<sup>2</sup> of 1947. After the countries of Central and Eastern Europe under Soviet influence and the Soviet Union itself rejected the aid, the participating countries of Western, Northern and Southern Europe, together with the United States, established the OEEC (Organisation for European Economic Cooperation) in 1948. Its aim was to promote European trade, economic stability and development, and also to coordinate

and distribute assistance received from America under the Marshall Plan. In 1961, the OEEC was redesigned considerably in terms of its objectives and operation: it converted from a European organisation of reconstruction into a cooperation organisation for the industrialised countries. Thus, the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) was created.

Although the OEEC (and later on, the OECD) could not be viewed as an organisation aimed at integration—similarly to the Council of Europe—its emergence signalled differing economic paths towards progress taken by the western and the eastern sides of Europe due to political divisions. The political and economic detachment of Central and Eastern Europe and its binding to the Soviet Union was indicated by the formation in 1949 of an organisation that was guided by the Soviet Union and which represented a top-down economic integration of the communist countries, i.e. the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON). Nevertheless, the COMECON could not be considered as an example of integration *par excellence* either since its activity was primarily confined, at least in the early period, to barter agreements.

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2 The Marshall Plan, named after Secretary of State of the United States of America George C. Marshall, was initially proposed as an American aid package offered by the USA to all European states for reconstruction after the war. However, the Marshall Aid was utilised only by countries of Western, Northern and Southern Europe, while countries of Central and Eastern Europe under Soviet influence rejected the plan of the instructions of the Soviet Union.



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The sight of an Eastern Europe forming a political and also economic cluster had a fundamental influence on integration ambitions in Western Europe which, however, pursued a different course in terms of politics and economics. The setting up of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) in 1949 represented political, military, and defence security against the Soviet threat.

While the presence of the United States in NATO meant a guarantee for Western Europe in military terms, the area of thinking was more predominantly characterised by integration ambitions that could counter-balance the communist threat while at the same time make the western part of Europe independent from America.

## **Reference**

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